

South Carolina State Arsenal ("Old Citadel")
North side of Marion Square
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-184

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE ARSENAL ("OLD CITADEL")

Address: North side of Marion Square, Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina

Present Owner: Charleston County

Present Occupant: Charleston County government

Present Use: County office building

Brief Statement of Significance: This early nineteenth-century building was intended as a safeguard against slave uprisings; it was later occupied for 80 years by the South Carolina Military Academy (The Citadel).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Originally built by the State of South Carolina as a state arsenal. Home of the South Carolina Military Academy (The Citadel), 1843-1922. Now Charleston County Center. [Colonel O. J. Bond, The Story of the Citadel (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), pp. 7, 19, 202]
2. Date of erection: Begun by 1826. [Robert Mills, Statistics of South Carolina, Including a View of its Natural, Civil and Military History, General and Particular (Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826), p. 421]
3. Architect: Frederick Wesner [Bond, p. 7]
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Originally a plain, two-story, brick building with a wooden parapet. [John P. Thomas, History of the South Carolina Military Academy, with Appendices (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Cogswell Company, 1893), p. 24]
5. Notes on alterations and additions: Third story added, 1849; wings added to center building, 1854; west wing burned, 1869; west wing rebuilt 1889; main building damaged by fire, 1892, restored same year. [Thomas, p. 577] Fourth story added, 1910 [Bond, p. 172]. East (Meeting Street) extension added 1911 [Bond, p. 174]. West extension pulled down, 1958.

- B. Historical Events Connected with Structure: The abortive Charleston Negro Insurrection of 1822 led to the building of the Citadel to house an arsenal guard for the purpose of protection (Bond, p.1).

Occupied by Federal troops, 1865-79 (Bond, pp. 92 and 94).

Prepared by Beatrice St. J. Ravenel
Architectural Historian
Charleston
July 1958

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: An interesting example of military architecture which has undergone major alterations. It is still impressive in scale and distinguished in proportion.
2. Condition of fabric: Generally good, and reasonably well maintained. Although the original walls have been loaded considerably by the addition of two stories the structure appears stable.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: The main building is about 155' x 250'; it has four stories and faces south. A connecting building to the east is about 80' x 120', two stories in height.
2. Foundations: A relatively inconspicuous base course.
3. Wall construction: This is stucco over brick. Bricks visible at the northwest tower are 9 1/4" long, 2 3/4" to 3" high, and 4 1/4" to 4 5/8" wide, laid in English bond, 7 courses in 2'-0". They are of a type common in Charleston, rather dark red in color, with spots of brown caused by oxidation of iron in the material. Joints average 1/2" to 5/8" in width; the original mortar is visible in places. It appears to have been made with shell lime, shell chips and yellow sand. There is evidence of considerable repointing of joints and patching of stucco. It is possible that the stucco now visible may date from the addition of the fourth story in 1910.

4. South facade: This has projecting three-story towers at the corners, their exterior angles being less than 90 degrees. There is a central entrance consisting of a two-story arch, a corbeled bay window at the third story framed by corbeled turrets, which, with a corbel cornice, extend slightly above the main wall. There are five bays of widely spaced windows on each side.

The other three facades are similar but lack the central motif.

5. Courtyard facades: The interior court is about 70' by 164'. A large arcade surrounds the court, two stories in height; it is three bays by seven bays, with Greek Doric columns (piers along the north side) of brick and stucco, and plain semicircular arches springing from the capitals. A wooden floor and railing cut across the bays at second-floor level.

At the third story--added later--are smaller arches with plain piers, six bays by fourteen bays, and a wooden railing. The fourth story, added still later, is similar. It is terminated by a plain parapet.

At the center of the north wall is a modern brick and stucco stairway from the ground to the second story. Symmetrical flights turn and meet on a central landing at the second-floor level.

6. Porches: The three upper floors of the courtyard arcades constitute a porch and circulation passage. Flooring at second-story level appears older than the rest; it is of 1-1/2" thick longleaf yellow pine boards 6-3/4" wide, splined. This flooring is supported on six joists which run parallel to the passageway, successive joists being set into notches in the girders which become deeper toward the outside, to pitch the floor for drainage. A cased lintel extends from column to column to support three girders per bay. This construction is exposed to form the ceiling of the first-floor passageway; the joists are beaded at the lower corners. The superiority of this older flooring is shown by the fact that it has not buckled from wetting, while the newer flooring on the upper floors has buckled in a number of places.

The third and fourth floors have narrower tongue-and-groove boards. Ceilings above the first floor are generally of matched and beaded boards.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance at the center of the south facade consists of a two-story elliptical-arched opening with a wide stucco architrave molding, interrupted by a keystone and plain impost blocks. At the second floor level is a spandrel; above this the opening contains an ornamental wrought iron grille, behind which are windows. Inside this entrance is a passage covered by a brick groined vault of two bays, of elliptical section; at the inner end of this passage is an elliptical arch which retains huge pintles (although the doors are no longer in place).

At the center of the east and west facades are low tunnel-vaulted passages (the vaulting being one brick stretcher in thickness) with plain arches. Heavy pintles for doors remain embedded in the jambs.

- b. Windows: Openings are rectangular, without exterior trim, with sandstone sills. Sash are of wood, double hung, two-lights-over-two-lights (modern). The two third-story windows over the main entrance have wrought iron balconies.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: The roof is flat, slightly pitched toward the inner corners of the courtyard, to drain through relatively modern round metal leaders.
- b. Cornice and parapets: The exterior wall, towers and bay window over the main entrance are crowned with plain, square battlements. The cornice is a rather heavy cavetto, except as noted below. The material appears to be stucco throughout.
 - (1) The cornice of the towers, central portion of the south facade, and the central bay window is supported on plain, heavy brackets.
 - (2) In the courtyard there is a simple molded stucco cornice at the top of the third story and a simple fourth-story cornice of two corbeled brick courses, stuccoed.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: An open rectangular court has a passage around the four sides; they give access to a single row of rooms around the perimeter.
2. Stairways: A stair hall is centered on the south facade, above the first floor, with a wooden stairway at the east and an elevator at the west; these appear relatively modern. A stone stairway enclosed between walls leads from the ground to the second floor, just east of the entranceway of this facade.

At each corner of the courtyard is an iron or steel stairway; they are trussed with turnbuckles to adjust the tension. They may date from the late 19th century or early 20th century.

3. Interior finish and trim

- a. General: A very large portion of the interior has been refinished with modern floor covering, acoustic ceilings, fluorescent lighting fixtures, etc. At present extensive partitioning and refinishing is being done on the fourth story.
- b. Partitions: Between the rooms and courtyard, on the north side, the partition is of frame, with matched and beaded boarding, above the first story. Similar partitions on the other three sides are of brick covered with stucco. A number of partitions between rooms appear to be of masonry. Fourth story partitions all appear to be frame.
- c. Old trim on second story, possibly original: Door and window trim is of wood, simple, with both edges raised; soffits of the windows are paneled. Doors have six panels. Some rooms have fireplaces with simple wide pilasters, frieze, and mantel shelf with bed moldings. The above details are to be found in some offices of the south wing. In the office immediately east of the central hall can be seen the remains of a rifle port, although it is closed on the exterior; it is thought to be typical of an early state of the building.
- d. Trim on third and fourth stories: Appears to be of a type common at the end of the 19th century--wainscoting of vertical matched and beaded boards, simple wood window and door trim (reeded on the courtyard side of doorways), and doors with three horizontal panels below and six glazed panes above, with transoms.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: This building occupies the northern portion of a large public square, which formerly served as a drill field. Other public buildings adjoin it to the east and west.
2. Detached east wing: Until a few years ago the Old Citadel comprised the central building--the one described above--and detached wings at the east and west. The west wing has now been demolished.
 - a. Connecting court: Two 32'-walls connect the central building and the east wing, forming a small court, with 12'-wide arched openings and battlements. These walls are one story in height.
 - b. Exterior: This is of stucco over brick, two stories in height, about 80' x 120', with 25'-wide towers at the corners which rise slightly higher than the walls. There is a high base, which takes the form of a talus at the towers. Window openings are small, semicircular-arched, with a hood molding. There is a stucco cornice with battlements above; the towers have a corbeled cornice, and above it square turrets at the corners.
 - c. Interior: This appears to have been modernized to the extent that one cannot recognize its original appearance.
3. East building of the group: Beyond the detached east wing is another building somewhat harmonious in appearance, which appears to be quite modern. Until a few years ago it was balanced by another one on the west, recently destroyed and replaced by a new library building.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
July 1962